

**THE BYZANTINE ARISTOCRACY  
IN THE PALAEOLOGAN PERIOD:  
A STORY OF ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT**



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On 15 August 1261, Michael VIII Palaeologus entered the city of Constantinople in triumph; he was the second Constantine, who had restored the fortunes of the state and of the capital, in western hands for so long. He saw himself as the continuator of the long line of Byzantine emperors; but in fact, his reign initiated a new period in Byzantine history, a chaotic period, full of seminal developments, which changed drastically the character of the Byzantine Empire. It became a small Balkan state, it became more homogeneous ethnically than it ever had been before, it became more conscious than ever of its Greek character, and it lost its centralized government, becoming a decentralized state, with a multiplicity of authorities. For much too long these developments have been taken as symptoms of decay, and few self-respecting Byzantinists have allowed themselves to soil their hands with the last two hundred years of "decline." Now, of course, this has changed, as historians realize that the decline has within it the seeds of the future, and that what used to be taken as the deathrattle of a glorious past was in fact the birthpangs of the future.

One of the most important characteristics of the Palaeologan period is the existence of an aristocracy whose social, political, and economic role increased as the power and influence of the imperial court and the capital declined. The Byzantine aristocracy of this period begins to resemble in several of its aspects the feudal nobility of parts of western Europe. When one studies the Byzantine developments, therefore, one almost inevitably is tempted to adopt the comparative approach, use the research that has been done on parallel developments in the West, and ask the kinds of questions that have been asked about the western European aristocracy: What were the distinguishing characteristics of the Palaeologan aristocracy, and was this aristocracy also a nobility? What were the origins of the people who formed the aristocracy? What was their political role? What did they contribute to the economic organization of society, and what to society as a whole? Is the existence of

an aristocracy to be taken as evidence of political and social decay, or as the symptom of change, without negative designations?<sup>1</sup>

The first problem that will concern us here is that of definition. There was, in the Byzantine Empire of the Palaeologan period, a group of laymen who formed the ruling elite of the society, and who can best be described by one contemporary term, "the powerful" (*δυνατοί*).<sup>2</sup> What were the distinguishing characteristics of this elite, and what was its membership? Although the powerful were a variegated group, their general distinguishing characteristics were the following: They were in possession of land, held either in full possession or in the form of *pronoia*. Since the Byzantine economy was increasingly becoming a land-based one, their possession of land gave them economic power; since the central state was steadily becoming weaker, the landowners were adding political independence to their economic strength.<sup>3</sup> The members of this group of powerful were active in the army, in the administration, and in the cities. They were also the ones who were active in the intellectual field, as patrons, as audience, and as contributors.

Granted that there was an aristocracy in the Byzantine Empire of the Palaeologan period, was there also a nobility, as there was in western Europe? A nobility, as I understand the term, consists of a hereditary caste, whose rights and privileges are safeguarded by law. Thus, the nobility of medieval western Europe, at least after the thirteenth century, possessed hereditary titles that were tied, in one way or another, to the possession of the land. In England and France the nobles possessed the right to judgment by their peers, and benefited from sumptuary laws.<sup>4</sup> Some of the German nobility was forbidden to marry outside the noble class; and in medieval France and Germany, it became increasingly a trait of the nobility that they should not work. I can find no trace of such a noble caste in Byzantium of the Palaeologan period. What Guillard has called the "noblesse de race," members of the senatorial class of the early period who could, correctly or not, trace

<sup>1</sup> Parts of this paper were delivered at the A. H. A. Convention, on December 29, 1971. The paper was written while I was undertaking a general study of economic and social developments in the Palaeologan period, with the help of a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation. I am indebted to Professor D. M. Nicol, of King's College, London, for his help, and for allowing me to use the Koraes Library. For the contribution of Russian and other Marxist scholars to the study of Byzantine social history, see E. Werner, "Gesellschaft und Kultur im XIV. Jahrhundert; Sozial-oekonomischen Fragen," *XIV<sup>e</sup> Congrès international des études byzantines, Rapports 1* (Bucharest 1971) 31-49.

<sup>2</sup> This paper will not deal with the clergy, although it may be argued that as a corporate entity it certainly had sufficient wealth and power to be considered part of the aristocracy.

<sup>3</sup> B. T. Gorjanov, *Pozdnevizantijskij feodalizm* (Moscow 1962) 102ff.

<sup>4</sup> Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans. L. A. Manyon, (London 1961) 320-344. For his definition of nobility, see 331.

their family back to imperial Rome, had surely disappeared.<sup>5</sup> In Byzantium of the Palaeologan period, there was a Senate, and there was a senatorial class.<sup>6</sup> But membership in this class was not strictly hereditary, for some office-holders became members of the Senate *ex officio*.<sup>7</sup> And office, of course, was never hereditary in Byzantium. Nor was membership in the senatorial class either a necessary prerequisite or an adequate guarantee of social distinction. It seems very probable that members of the Senate and of the senatorial class were relatively well off; some of them were *pronoia*-holders,<sup>8</sup> and it may be assumed that some of these *pronoia*-holders had military obligations.<sup>9</sup> As *pronoia*-holders, many of them must also have had exemption from certain taxes on their lands. The point, however, is that there were no rights or privileges attached to a class as such, no class privileges safeguarded by law, and thus, I suggest, no nobility—at least not yet.

There was, then, a Byzantine aristocracy, but no Byzantine nobility. Once this general statement has been made, it is important to differentiate between subgroups. The most visible part of the Byzantine aristocracy consisted of the few families who were at the very top. Their names appear in the narrative sources and in the documents; they were those who ruled the state. When Theodore II Lascaris died in 1258, the great families he had persecuted banded together to bring about the downfall of George Muzalon, and the election of Michael Palaeologus as regent. Pachymeres and Akropolites mention the

<sup>5</sup> R. Guiland, "La noblesse de race à Byzance," *Byzantinoslavica* (hereafter *BS*) 9 (1948) 307-314 = *Recherches sur les institutions byzantines* (hereafter *Recherches*) 1 (Berlin 1967) 15-20. On the question of the existence of a Byzantine nobility, see also Günther Weiss, *Joannes Kantakuzenos—Aristokrat, Staatsmann, Kaiser und Mönch—in der Gesellschaftsentwicklung von Byzanz im 14. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden 1969) 5-11.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Cantacuzenus on Sphrantzes Palaiologos, in *Ioannis Cantacuzeni eximperatoris Historiarum Libri IV* ed. L. Schopen, 3 vols. (Bonn 1828, 1831, 1832) 1.451: "τῶν συγκλητικῶν εἰς." Cf. L.-P. Raybaud, *Le gouvernement et l'administration centrale de l'Empire byzantin sous les premiers Paléologues (1258-1354)* (Paris 1968) 128-139.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 128-130.

<sup>8</sup> See the famous statement of Pachymeres on Michael VIII's gifts to senators, in George Pachymeres, *De Michael et Andronico Palaeologis*, 2 vols., ed. I. Bekker (Bonn 1835) 1.97: "καὶ τοὺς μὲν τῆς γερονσίας οὕτω μεγαλοπρεπῶς ἐθεράπευε, προνοίας τούτοις ἐπαύξων καὶ προστιθείς, καὶ χαίρειν ἀφίεις τοῖς πᾶσι, τῶν ἀγαθῶν τὰ μὲν λαμβάνουσι τὰ δ' ἐλπίζουσι." Cf. Cantacuzenus (n. 6 above) 2.63 (1340-1341): "ὁ μέγας δομέστικος τῶν τε συγκλητικῶν καθ' ἕνα καὶ τῶν ἄλλως εὐγενεῖα διαφερόντων, ἔπειτα καὶ στρατιώτας μετακαλούμενος, τῆς τε παρὰ βασιλέως ἀποτεταγμένης ἐκάστῳ προνοίας ἐπινθάνετο τὸν ἀριθμὸν καὶ εἰ τοσοῦτον κέκτηται νῦν ἢ τοῦ τεταγμένου ἦττον." He then added new lands to the *pronoiai* of those who had less than they should; he also increased the holdings of some people whose *pronoiai* had not been diminished.

<sup>9</sup> The passage in Pachymeres (n. 8 above) 1.97, clearly distinguishes between the "senators" and the "soldiers." But there are numerous examples of men who were of senatorial rank and at the same time held military office. See for example the career of John Choumnos, eldest son of Nicephorus Choumnos: J. Verpeaux, "Notes prosopographiques sur la famille Choumnos," *BS* 20 (1959) 257.

names of the conspirators, and these were the names most important in the empire until the fall of Constantinople. The conspirators were Alexios Strategopoulos, Constantine Tornikes, Theodore Philes, members of the families of Raoul, Nestongos, Kavallarios, Kamytzes, Angelos, Aprenos, Livadarios, Tarchaneiotas, Philanthropenos, Cantacuzenus and, of course, Palaeologus.<sup>10</sup>

These and others, like the Melissenoi, were families that had long possessed great landed wealth, and which had given to the state great soldiers: this was the twin basis of their strength in 1258. After 1258, they intermarried, they conserved their landed wealth and increased their political power. It is impossible to trace the careers of these great families in such a short paper. This is a work that requires a great deal of attention, and which is only now being undertaken seriously.<sup>11</sup> It is important, however, to make a few points about them. First, it should be noted that most of these families were already well established by 1258. The Cantacuzenus family, for example, appears as early as the time of Alexius I Comnenus, as does the Palaeologus family; both families had members active in the army down to the 1250s.<sup>12</sup> The first-known Raoul, a westerner, came to Constantinople at the time of

<sup>10</sup> George Akropolites, *Χρονική Συγγραφή*, ed. I. Bekker, (Bonn 1837) 165; Pachymeres 1.65.

<sup>11</sup> I am noting here the most useful studies on various families. On the Cantacuzeni, there is one major recent study by D. M. Nicol, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus), ca. 1100-1460* (Washington 1968) with good bibliography; G. Weiss's *Joannes Kantakouzenos* (n. 5 above) is of rather narrower scope. On the Palaeologi, there is only the rather defective study by A. Th. Papadopoulos, *Versuch einer Genealogie der Palaiologen, 1259-1453* (Munich 1938), and V. Laurent, "La généalogie des premiers Paléologues," *Byzantion* (hereafter *Byz.*) 8 (1933) 125-149. On the Raoul, there is A. Ch. Chatzes, *Οἱ 'Ραούλ, 'Ράλα, 'Ράλοι (1080-1800). Ἱστορικὴ Μονογραφία*. (Munich 1909), and G. Ostrogorsky, "Alexios Raoul, Grossdomestikos von Serbien," *Festschrift P. E. Schramm* 1 (Wiesbaden 1964) 340-352. Mr. Sterios Fassoulakis, of King's College, London is preparing a new study of the family. On the Tornikioi, see Gudrun Schmaltzbauer, "Die Tornikioi in der Palaiologenzeit; Prosopographische Untersuchung zu einer byzantinischen Familie," *Jahrbuch der Oesterreichischen Byzantinistik* 18 (1969) 115-135, and J. Darrouzès, "Notes sur Euthyme Tornikès, Euthyme Malakès et Georges Tornikès," *Revue des études byzantines* (hereafter *REB*) 23 (1965) 148-167. On the Tarchaneiotai, see G. I. Theodorides, "Μιχαὴλ Δούκας Γλαβᾶς Ταρχανειώτης (Προσωπογραφικά)," *Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἑπετηρὶς τῆς φιλοσοφικῆς Σχολῆς τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκης* 7 (1957) 183-206. On the Asen, see Th. I. Uspenskij, "Bolgarskie Aseneviči na Vizantijskoj službe v XIII-XV vv.," *Izvestija russkago archaeol. inst. v Konstantinopole* 13 (1908) 1-15. On the Philanthropeni, see Athenagoras, Metropolitan of Paramythia and Filiates, "Συμβολαὶ εἰς τὴν ἱστορίαν τοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ Οἴκου τῶν Φιλανθρωπηνῶν," *Δελτίον τῆς ἱστορικῆς καὶ ἐθνολογικῆς ἐταιρείας τῆς Ἑλλάδος*, n.s. 1 (1928-29) 61-74; for bibliography, see D. M. Nicol, "Constantine Akropolites: A Prosopographical Note," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 19 (1965) 240 n. 10. On the Ducae and other families who used the name, see D. I. Polemis, *The Doukai. A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (London 1968).

<sup>12</sup> Nicol, *Kantakouzenos* (n. 11 above) 3-9; Laurent (n. 11 above) has established the descent of Michael VIII from an ancestor who was active in the late eleventh century.

the invasion of Robert Guiscard, and the family became so important that at the time of Theodore II an Alexios Raoul was *protovestiarior*; there were, in the fourteenth century, *megaloï domestikoi*.<sup>13</sup> The Tornikioi have an ancestry going back to the early tenth century, and there was a Demetrius Tornikes, *logothetes tou dromou*, who died in 1198.<sup>14</sup> The Philanthropenoi probably went back to the mid-twelfth century, although the military talent of the family shone much more brilliantly during the Palaeologan period.<sup>15</sup>

The Nestongos family also goes back to at least the middle of the twelfth century.<sup>16</sup>

Michael VIII Palaeologus came to the throne as a result of the coup d'état of the great families against the regency of the brothers Muzalon, whom they considered as parvenus. And the triumph of Michael VIII was the triumph of the high aristocracy, civil and military. To the members of the Senate he gave high offices;<sup>17</sup> he made the *pronoiai* of the soldiers hereditary; and he pursued effectively a policy of matrimonial alliances with the great families. Before he became regent, he had married off his sister Irene to John Cantacuzenus. Michael's brother Constantine married Maria, the daughter of the *strategos* Branas, in 1260, and another brother, John, married a daughter of the *grand primmikerios* Constantine Tornikes.<sup>18</sup>

Intermarriage between members of the rich and powerful families had long been an established practice in Byzantium: Michael VIII occasionally described himself as DiploPalaiologos, descendent of the Palaeologi from both sides of his family, and he boasted of his family's marriage connections with the Ducae, the Angeli, and the Comneni.<sup>19</sup> During the last two centuries of the existence of the Byzantine Empire, the great families intermarried very frequently; an obvious proof of this lies in the very names a Byzantine aristocrat might use. The Byzantines found it quite proper to adopt the names of in-laws, even if the connection had taken place some time in the past; and by the late fourteenth century, Byzantine aristocrats might have three or four great names attached to their own. Perhaps the most dramatic manifestation of this phenomenon appears in the name of a young man who died in the

<sup>13</sup> Chatzes (n. 11 above) 9-15.

<sup>14</sup> Schmaltzbauer (n. 11 above) 115-117.

<sup>15</sup> Athenagoras (n. 11 above) 61-74.

<sup>16</sup> Polemis (n. 11 above) 150-152.

<sup>17</sup> Pachymeres (n. 8 above) 1.97: "τὸ δ' ἐντεῦθεν οἱ μὲν τῆς γερονσίας προσήκουσιν ὀφφικίοις ἐσεμνύοντο."

<sup>18</sup> Papadopoulos (n. 11 above). Cf. Peter Charanis, "On the Social Structure and Economic Organisation of the Byzantine Empire in the Thirteenth Century and Later," *BS* 12 (1951) 106; G. K. Kordatos, *Ἀκμή καὶ παρακμή τοῦ Βυζαντίου* (Athens 1954), mentions these families as having pro-Lascarid sentiments.

<sup>19</sup> J. G. Troitzkij, ed., *Imperatoris Michaelis de vita sua opusculum necnon regulae quam ipse monasterio S. Demetrii praescripsit fragmentum* (St. Petersburg 1885) 2.

Morea in the fifteenth century: John Tornikes Ducas Angelos Palaeologos Raoul Laskaris Philanthropenos Asan.<sup>20</sup>

Not only did the great families intermarry, so that by the fourteenth century they could all claim imperial descent; they also formed a group that was close to the throne, and whose members could fight for control of the throne with relative impunity.<sup>21</sup> It is true that there were not many dynastic struggles outside the immediate imperial family in the Palaeologan period. But the interesting thing is that when such struggles did occur, and the contestant was defeated, he was not punished nearly so severely as he would have been in the tenth century or earlier. Michael VIII's act of cruelty in blinding the young John IV Lascaris was expensive to him not only because the Lascarids were much loved in Asia Minor, but also because to many of the nobility—the Tarchaneiotes and the Raoul and the Philanthropenoi among them—this was a breach of manners. In 1295, a young general, Alexius Philanthropenos, a relative of the ruling emperor, Andronicus II, rebelled in Asia Minor where he had been sent to fight against the Turks. Despite his large following among the native population, whose sympathies were probably kindled by their pro-Lascarid and Arsenite sentiments, he was unsuccessful. His rebellion failed, in great part because of the opposition of Livadarios, another great magnate of Asia Minor. Andronicus II was still uncertain enough of his throne, and hurt enough by this family disloyalty, to allow Alexius to be blinded. But several years later, in 1323, the blind general was once more sent to Asia Minor, to the region of Philadephia, where both the Greek inhabitants and the raiding Turks knew his valor. And he was also made governor of Lesbos. There may be a mention of this last event in the *Song of Belisarios*, a version of which was written in the mid-fourteenth century.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> D. A. Zakythinos, *Le Despotat grec de Morée* 2 (Athens 1953) 213; cf. Schmaltzbauer (n. 11 above) 133 entry 27. Or see the Lincoln College *Typikon*, H. Delehaye, *Deux typika byzantins de l'époque des Paléologues* (Brussels 1921) 12-14.

<sup>21</sup> Weiss (n. 5 above) 32-38.

<sup>22</sup> On Philanthropenos's rebellion and his subsequent return to grace, see Pachymeres (n. 8 above) 2.210-229, Gregoras, *Byzantina historia*, ed. L. Schopen, 3 vols. (Bonn, 1829, 1830, 1855) 1.195-202, 360-361, 534, and A. E. Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins: The Foreign Policy of Andronicus II, 1282-1328* (Cambridge, Mass. 1972) chap. 3. See also M. Treu, *Maximi monarchi Planudis epistulae* (Breslau 1886) passim. The *Song of Belisarios* is published in Guilelmus Wagner, *Carmina Graeca medii Aevi* (Leipzig 1874), "Διήγησις ὁραιολάτῃ τοῦ θανμαστοῦ ἀνδρός τοῦ λεγομένου Βελισαρίου", and by E. Follieri, "Il poema bizantino del Belisario," *La poesia epica e la sua formazione*, in *Accademia Naz. dei Lincei*, 367 (1970) 583-651. Hans-Georg Beck, in his "Belisar-Philanthropenos. Das Belisar-Lied der Palaiologenzeit," *Serta Monacensia* (Fr. Babinger zum 15. Januar 1951 als Festgruss dargebracht) (Leiden 1952) 46-52, and also in "Die griechische Volksliteratur des 14. Jahrhunderts: Beiträge zu einer Standortsbestimmung," *XIV<sup>e</sup> Congrès* (n. 1 above) 77, identifies Philanthropenos with the Belisarios of the poem. Mrs. Maria Fotina is writing her dissertation on the *Song of Belisarios*, at Birkbeck College under the direction of Professor R. Browning. She argues, convincingly, I think, that in the fourteenth-

The one successful usurper was, of course, John Cantacuzenus who became Emperor John VI. His own struggle for the throne was supported by many members of the aristocracy, especially the military aristocracy, as opposed to the Senate.<sup>23</sup> But what is of interest here, is that John VI, who had fought two civil wars against the Palaeologi, was not even forced to subside into graceful retirement. He became a monk in 1354, but his political activities did not stop here. Recent scholarship has discovered that he continued as the councilor of the Emperor John V, both at Constantinople and in the Morea, and that his active political life ended only with his death, in 1383.<sup>24</sup> Thus, it appears that there was an unwritten code that forbade strict measures against those who fought for the throne and lost. Of course, the realist will see that the power of the great families was such, and the central state was so weakened, that it would be most impolitic for the Palaeologi to alienate any of the families with whom they had intermarried and who participated in the government of the empire.

The great families, all of which could claim at least one imperial ancestor, were proud, and conscious of their social position. The sources often speak of "noble men, of the highest class," "those most glorious of men, and closely related to the Emperors," "the illustrious nobility of birth";<sup>25</sup> we find constant references to the nobility of line and the illustrious ancestry of individuals. Such references are so common that they have been taken to prove the existence of a Byzantine nobility.<sup>26</sup> The only thing they do prove is that the great families of the Palaeologan period, proud of their role as soldiers, were also proud of their blood, and contemptuous of those not blessed with imperial ancestors.

century interpolations of the poem, Belisarios and his son are to be identified with Andronicus III and Alexius Apokaukos respectively. The reference in the poem to the blinding of Belisarios, however, and to the expedition to Mytilene, may well echo memories of Philanthropenos. Cf. P. Schreiner, "Zur Geschichte Philadelphias," *Orientalia christiana periodica* 35 (1969) 375-432.

<sup>23</sup> On the social origins of Cantacuzenus's followers, see Weiss (n. 5 above) 23-31, 32-43, 44-53. According to Mrs. Fotina, the fourteenth-century version of the *Song of Belisarios* describes the struggle between Andronicus II and Andronicus III, and the civil war between Alexius Apokaukos and John VI as social struggles between the advocates of the people (Andronicus III and Alexius Apokaukos) and the high aristocracy (Cantacuzenus and the great families: Raoul, Asan, Lascaris, Dukas, Sphrantzes, Astras, Diplovatatzes).

<sup>24</sup> Nicol, *Kantakouzenos* (n. 11 above) 88-91; J. W. Barker, *Manuel II Palaeologus, 1391-1425: A Study in Late Byzantine Statesmanship* (New Brunswick 1969) 8-9, 37-40.

<sup>25</sup> "ἄνδρες εὐγενεῖς καὶ τῆς πρώτης τυγχάνοντες τάξεως"; "τοὺς ἐπιφανεστέρους μᾶλλον τῶν ἀνδρῶν καὶ προσήκοντας βασιλεῦσι"; "τῶν ἐπ' εὐγενεῖα λαμπρυνομένων"; "οἱ εὐγενέστεροι". Akropolites (n. 10 above) 165; Cantacuzenus (n. 6 above) 1.213, 2.166, 84, 132. Weiss (n. 5 above) 5ff., has a long list of such references in Cantacuzenus.

<sup>26</sup> See Weiss (n. 5 above), and Guiland (n. 5 above) *Recherches* 1.15-22.

Those who claimed to belong to "the highest class" drew interesting lines of distinction between themselves and the rest of the population. Certainly, the majority of the population was referred to with contempt as the "πληθος," the "demos," the *ὄχλος δημώδης*, the "πένητες," "ἰδιῶται," or "ἄτιμοι."<sup>27</sup> Equally, however, there were social distinctions between the very powerful and those who had what to us might seem like moderately important ancestry and power. Cantacuzenus, the proud aristocrat, was particularly careful about social distinctions. Sphrantzes Palaeologos, senator and *grand stratopedarches*, was described as "a man of senatorial family, but not of the highest nobility"; we know that he was a fairly rich man, as well as being of senatorial rank, but this was not sufficient for Cantacuzenus.<sup>28</sup> Speaking of a certain Apelmené, the same historian wrote: "from an insignificant, low [ancestry], he became most important and illustrious";<sup>29</sup> but Apelmené was not of a totally unknown family, for there were a Demetrius and a Constantine Apelmené, *exisotai* for the *theme* of Thessalonica in 1301.<sup>30</sup> Cantacuzenus's greatest animosity was reserved for his able opponent, Alexius Apokaukos, "an insignificant man, from insignificant family," "an insignificant man of vile birth," whose "obscure origins and vileness of manner and birth we are not ignorant of."<sup>31</sup> At least in part, the civil war of 1341-1347 was fought as a war between the powerful aristocracy and what they considered as the mob, under the leadership of Apokaukos. And yet, although Apokaukos's immediate family may not have been very illustrious, people of the same name had been active in the Byzantine Empire since the late tenth century, when we find a *strategos* Basil

<sup>27</sup> See for example, Cantacuzenus (n. 6 above) 2.16, 12, 176, 235; Isidore of Thessalonica, Codex Par. gr. 1192, fol. 89v.

<sup>28</sup> Cantacuzenus (n. 6 above) 1.451: "τῶν συγκλητικῶν εἰς, οὐδὲ πᾶν δὲ τῶν ἐπ' εὐγενεῖα λαμπρυνομένων." A Maria Petraliphaina (daughter of an important family), had married a Sphrantzes who died in 1257: P. J. Alexander, "A Chrysobull of the Emperor Andronicus III Palaiologos in Favor of the See of Kanina (Albania)," *Byz.* 15 (1940-1941) 198-200. She seems to have had a son, Gabriel, who was keeper of the imperial seal for a time under Michael VIII: Pachymeres (n. 8 above) 1.493: Alexander 201.) On the property of Sphrantzes Palaiologos, see Cantacuzenus (n. 6 above) 1.457; L. Petit-W. Regel, "Actes d'Esphigménou," *Vizantiiskij Vremennik* (hereafter V.V.) 12 supp. 1 (1906, repr. 1967) 41. See also R. Guiland, "Le stratopédarque et grand stratopédarque," *Recherches* 1.498-521, and V. Laurent, "Σφραντζῆς et non Φραντζῆς" *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 44 (1951) 373-378; N. Oikonomides, *Actes de Dionysiou* (Paris 1968) n. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Cantacuzenus (n. 6 above) 2.247.

<sup>30</sup> F. Dölger, *Aus den Schatzkammern des Heiligen Berges* (Munich 1948) 193ff.; V. Laurent, "La chronologie des recenseurs ou apographeis du thème de Thessalonique avant et après 1300," *REB* 6 (1948) 81-84; P. Lemerle, *Philippe et la Macédoine orientale à l'époque chrétienne et byzantine* 1 (Paris 1945) 227-229.

<sup>31</sup> Cantacuzenus (n. 6 above) 1. 117-118: "ἄσημον ὄντα καὶ ἐξ ἀσήμων." 2.89: "ἄσημος ἐκ φαύλων φύς"; 2.278: "τὴν μὲν οὖν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἀφάνειαν τὴν σὴν καὶ τὴν φαυλότητα καὶ τῶν τρόπων καὶ τοῦ γένους, οὐδ' αὐτοὶ ἀγνοοῦμεν."



Apokaukos.<sup>32</sup> Nearer our period, there was a *sebastohypertatos* John Apokaukos, of the same family as Alexius,<sup>33</sup> and John Apokaukos, Metropolitan of Nau-paktos. But this still did not make him equal in rank to Cantacuzenus.

The highest echelons of the Palaeologan aristocracy, then, consisted of a small group of families, very rich, very active in the running of the government, linked by marriage alliances, and proud of their heritage, which they thought conferred on them all sorts of privileges as well as duties and character traits.<sup>34</sup> In the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it seems to me that this part of the aristocracy became even more closed and ingrown than it had been earlier. Probably for the first time in its history, Byzantium was a closed society. But was it possible for outsiders to enter this select group? It seems that on occasion it was. The people who managed to enter this group from the outside were very few, but at least two avenues were available to men who were not *paroikoi* and who had exceptional talent. One avenue was the army. There was, for example, Tagaris, who, according to Cantacuzenus, "sprang from low and obscure origins, but brought great glory to himself by his valor and bravery in battle."<sup>35</sup> He managed to contract a good marriage to Theodora Asenina, a niece of Andronicus II, and reached the high military office of *grand stratopedarches*, which was usually held by men of great family.<sup>36</sup> A descendant, George Tagaris, held the same office around 1350, and the family, now well-connected, survived down to the fifteenth century.<sup>37</sup> The Sphrantzes family also made its fortune through the valor of Sphrantzes Palaiologos; they married into the great families, and they could use the names Doukas, Laskaris, Angelos, and Palaiologos.<sup>38</sup>

The other avenue was the imperial bureaucracy, much diminished as its functions now were. The first half of the fourteenth century yields some examples of imperial civil officials who brought their families from relative obscurity to social success, through the channels of marriage and the army. One example, that of Nicephorus Choumnos, is especially striking. Nicephorus Choumnos, who had a brilliant career in the reign of Andronicus II, could boast of a family name that went back to the eleventh century. In the late

<sup>32</sup> Polemis (n. 11 above) 100; Weiss (n. 5 above) 55.

<sup>33</sup> F. Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches* 3 (Munich 1932) n. 2026

<sup>34</sup> Cantacuzenus (n. 6 above) 1.213, has Andronicus III speak of the special obligations of those who are illustrious, and relatives of emperors.

<sup>35</sup> Cantacuzenus (n. 6 above) 91: "γένους μὲν ὥρμημένον ἐκ φαύλου καὶ ἀφανοῦς, ἀνδρεία δὲ καὶ τόλμη τῇ περὶ τὰς μάχας ἐπὶ πλείστον δόξης αὐτὸν ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ προελθόντα."

<sup>36</sup> Before Tagaris, there were three known *grand stratepedarchai*, a Synadenos, a Livadaros and a Senachereim—all members of established families. There was, perhaps, a fourth; an N. Raoul, ca. 1275-1345, known only from a poem of Philes.

<sup>37</sup> Guiland (n. 28 above) 507ff.; D. M. Nicol, "Philadelphia and the Tagaris Family," *Neo-Hellenika* 2 (1970) 9-17.

<sup>38</sup> Laurent (n. 28 above) 373-378.

twelfth century, a Theodore Choumnos with the rank of *sebastos* was a successful soldier, and Nicephorus claimed to be descendent from him. The family, however, was not among the most famous or the most powerful in Byzantium. Nicephorus Choumnos was the person who advanced the fortunes of the family. During the reign of Andronicus II, he became *mesazon*, *epi tou kanikleiou*, and governor of Thessalonica.<sup>39</sup> He acquired great property, as did Theodore Metochites, who had a similar *cursus honorum*. It is known that the Choumnos family had estates near Thessalonica, and Nicephorus's wealth in Constantinople was so well known that the Catalans were aware of it, and envious of it.<sup>40</sup> Nicephorus's immediate family benefited considerably from his position. His eldest son, John, married an imperial princess, a niece married a Tarchaneotes. John Choumnos was *grand stratopedarches*, while Nicephorus's other son George and his brother Theodore also held high office; and there was also a Nicephorus Choumnos, an official during the reign of John V. In the late fourteenth century, we find some monks and members of the imperial bureaucracy from the same family.<sup>41</sup> The greatest social success of Nicephorus's life, however, was the marriage of his daughter, Irene, to the despot John Palaeologus, third son of Andronicus II. The marriage was opposed by the empress, Yolanda (Irene) of Montferrat, who had other ambitions for her children, but Andronicus II insisted, and the sources express no surprise at the inequality of rank between John and Irene.<sup>42</sup> Theodore Metochites, the contemporary and rival of Nicephorus Choumnos, was also able to ally his family to the Palaeologi, by the marriage of his daughter Irene to a nephew of Andronicus II. One of his sons became *grand stratopedarches*.<sup>43</sup>

Alexius Apokaukos does not quite fit into this category because, although he made his fortune by insinuating himself into the service first of Andronicus Asen and then of the Emperor Andronicus II, he was not considered by the Byzantine aristocracy as their equal.

Whereas the self-definition and self-description of a social group present some interest, the historian must create his own classifications for purposes of analysis. The Byzantine high aristocracy saw themselves as "nobles,"

<sup>39</sup> Verpeaux (n. 9 above) 252-256; Ihor Ševčenko, *Études sur la polémique entre Théodore Métochite et Nicéphore Choumnos* (Brussels 1962) 6, 125, 147, 278.

<sup>40</sup> J.-Fr. Boissonade, *Anecdota nova* (Paris 1844) letter 24; V. Mošin, *Supplementa ad Acta graeca Chilandarii* (Ljubljana 1948) 15-17; Pachymeres (n. 8 above) 2.509.

<sup>41</sup> W. Regel, E. Kurtz, B. Korabiev, "Actes de Philothée," *V. V.* 20 (1913) 22-23, 27-33; Verpeaux (n. 9 above) 257-266; Guiland (n. 28 above) 507.

<sup>42</sup> Pachymeres (n. 8 above) 2.379; Gregoras (n. 22 above) 1.240-241. On Irene Choumnos, see V. Laurent, "Une princesse byzantine au cloître," *Échos d'Orient* 29 (1930) 29-60. Gregoras, like many other Byzantines, was very much opposed to marriages of members of the imperial family to westerners. See Gregoras 1.237-238, and my article, "A Byzantine Prince Latinized: Theodore Palaeologus, Marquis of Montferrat," *Byz.* 38 (1968) 396.

<sup>43</sup> Ševčenko (n. 39 above) 7 n. 1, and 149-150; Guiland (n. 28 above) 511.

but we cannot consider them as such. Their own classification of social groups does not hinge on the functional role of each subgroup, as our analysis must. This is why I chose earlier the term "powerful" to designate the aristocracy as a class; the term implies its opposite, and a functional relationship between the two.

In classifying the Byzantine aristocracy, I would separate it into two groups. In the first one, we have the few families I have already mentioned, plus the provincial aristocracy—which in the fifteenth century tended to merge with the great families. I would also include in this group the men whose property was not immense—not comparable to that of the Cantacuzeni or the Synadenoi, for example—but considerable. These were the men who were able to survive economically, and who enjoyed some political power. The economic cut-off point for this group probably lies in the vicinity of revenues of eighty hyperpyra per year—the revenue of the fourteenth-century *pronoia* holder, Manuel Berilas.<sup>44</sup> The real division between the first and second groups, however, depends less on specific revenues and more on function.

There was a dialectic relationship between the people I have just described and the members of the second group. This consisted of small *pronoia* holders, or of men who had a modest amount of free property, and who may have held very minor office in the provinces. The information we have about this group is inadequate, due to the nature of our sources. But there is enough evidence to prove its existence. There is the *prostagma* of Michael VIII (1272), in which Michael allowed his son and coemperor, Andronicus II, to increase the property of worthy soldiers by lands of an annual revenue of thirty-six hyperpyra.<sup>45</sup> When one considers the vastness of the properties of the great families it becomes clear that such an increase could only be significant for people with rather smaller means. Besides, the entire relevant paragraph of the *prostagma* refers to soldiers whose influence and power was so small that they could be removed from their *pronoiai* if they did not serve the emperor properly.

There is evidence that before 1302 and 1303 Asia Minor had a relatively large number of such people, who held military *pronoiai* of moderate extent, and whose main function was to serve in the army. Small *pronoiai* were being swallowed up by the great landlords and the unscrupulous soldiers in the late thirteenth century, which is why Andronicus II sent to Asia Minor John Tarchaneotes, to act as *exisotes* (1298). His efforts, unfortunately, were thwart-

<sup>44</sup> See P. Schreiner, "Zwei unedierte Praktika aus der zweiten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts," *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 19 (1970) 38, 42-46.

<sup>45</sup> A. Heisenberg, *Aus der Geschichte und Literatur der Palaiologenzeit*, Sitzungsberichte d. Bayer. Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philos.-philol. und historische Klasse (Munich 1920) 40. For this interpretation of the passage, see G. Ostrogorsky, *Pour l'histoire de la féodalité byzantine* (Brussels 1954) 96, 97 and n. 1; cf. Charanis (n. 18 above) 133.

ed by the landowners and the orthodox clergy, who hated him for being an Arsenite.<sup>46</sup> After the disastrous defeat of the Byzantine forces at the battle of Bapheus (1302), many of the *pronoia*-holders went west, to act as paid soldiers in the army of Michael IX in Thrace; at least this seems to be the significance of the fact that Michael had to melt his and his wife's gold and silver plate to pay his army of dispossessed *pronoia*-holders.<sup>47</sup> Shortly thereafter, in 1303, Andronicus II made one last effort to preserve the soldier small-holder in Asia Minor. He tried to parcel up the *pronoiai* held by the church, by monasteries, and by men close to him; but although the patriarch assented, the effort failed because of the Turkish raids.<sup>48</sup> Presumably, with the loss of Asia Minor most of these soldiers lost their property and therefore their membership in the Byzantine aristocracy.

In the European provinces too there were people with moderate holdings and moderate power. Gorjanov mentions small proprietors, with lands that were worked by anything from one to twenty-six *paroikoi*.<sup>49</sup> And there is, of course, the well-known chrysobull of John V (1342), issued at the request of certain soldiers of Serres, the Klazomenites. These soldiers requested, and received, a guarantee that they could keep part of their *oikonomiai* with no obligation to pay taxes, and with the possibility of transmitting it to their legitimate heirs so long as both they and their heirs performed their (presumably military) obligations. The *posotes*, the annual revenues, of these guaranteed *oikonomiai* was between ten and twelve *hyperpyra*.<sup>50</sup> Ostrogorsky has commented with some surprise on the very modest value of the revenues. But we have seen that there are other indications of the existence of soldiers who held small holdings, and whose tenure was conditional on military service.

At this point, of course, the question arises whether such people are to be considered as members of an aristocracy or not. Ostrogorsky, on the one hand, commenting on the chrysobull of 1342, calls the soldiers of Serres "représentants de la classe féodale." Dölger, on the other hand, talks of them as the equivalent of the peasant soldier of the tenth century.<sup>51</sup> In fact, if one accepts Lemerle's<sup>52</sup> rather than Ostrogorsky's view of the military holdings of the tenth century, one can see very little difference between the "peasant soldier" (the appellation itself is inaccurate, in Lemerle's terms) and soldiers like the Klazomenites. Both the tenth-century "soldier" and the small *pronoia*-holder

<sup>46</sup> Pachymeres (n. 8 above) 2.258-262.

<sup>47</sup> On this, see Laiou (n. 22 above) chaps. 4, 6.

<sup>48</sup> E. Fisher, "A Note on Pachymeres 'De Andronico Palaeologo,'" *Byz.* 40 (1970) 230-235.

<sup>49</sup> Gorjanov (n. 3 above) 104-105; cf. Werner (n. 1 above) 35.

<sup>50</sup> P. Lemerle, *Actes de Kuitlunus* (Paris 1946) 90-91 no. 20; cf. Dölger (n. 30 above) 58 no. 16; Ostrogorsky (n. 45 above) 124-125.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 125; Dölger (n. 30 above) 16.

<sup>52</sup> P. Lemerle, "Esquisse pour une histoire agraire de Byzance: les sources et les problèmes," *Revue historique* 219 (1958) 32-74, 254-284; 220 (1958) 43-94.

had lands that were hereditary in the first case, and were *becoming* hereditary in the second case; tenure in both cases was conditional on military service.<sup>53</sup> The real distinction between the tenth-century "soldier" and the fourteenth-century "soldier" was a social one. The term in the later period could be applied to members of a ruling elite, as it could not in the tenth century, and the Palaeologan soldier could possess large estates, unlike his earlier counterpart. But in the case of the Klazomenites, this social distinction hardly applies. They can only be considered an elite if one assumes that the majority of the population consisted of *paroikoi*. Otherwise, they must be seen as belonging to an intermediate category, between the aristocracy and the people. They must, I think, be compared to the small allodial holder of the western part of Europe in the tenth and eleventh centuries: men who held small properties, just barely allowing them to fulfill their military obligations. And in the midst of political insecurity and civil war, the small Byzantine *pronoia*-holder of the fourteenth century was under the same pressure from the large landowners as his western counterpart had been.

Returning to the first group, we find that some of the families, like the Cantacuzeni, the Synadenoi, and the others, had immense properties, most of them concentrated around a territorial base. Before the reconquest of Constantinople, those families that we subsequently meet in important positions in the reconstituted empire had their landed properties in Asia Minor.<sup>54</sup> Many others, of course, in the Morea and Thessaly, had stayed and lived under Frankish domination, and kept their lands. After 1261, it seems that the majority of great aristocrats moved from Asia Minor to Constantinople; this, along with Michael VIII's system of priorities, which relegated Asia Minor to a secondary level of importance, contributed to the rapid loss of the area. The powerful families received *pronoiai* in the western provinces, where they also seem to have held lands in full possession. The Philanthropenoi seem to have had lands in Thrace,<sup>55</sup> the Synadenoi had vast holdings in and around Vizyë and, as Cantacuzenus said, "they almost ruled the city."<sup>56</sup> The Byzantine aristocracy, like the Southern French and Northern Italian nobility,

<sup>53</sup> In economic terms, the family owning military holdings in the tenth century was much better off than the soldiers of Serres. One could buy off a year's campaign for 4-6 *nomismata* in the tenth century: Oikonomides (n. 28 above) 39, 41. The annual revenue must have been at least 3 times that amount (12-16 *nomismata*). The value of the hyperpyron was halved between 1204 and 1335: D. A. Zakythinos, *Crise monétaire et crise économique à Byzance du XII<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Athens 1948).

<sup>54</sup> Charanis (n. 18 above) 94-107.

<sup>55</sup> F. Miklosich, J. Müller, *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi* 1 (Vienna 1860) 138; Athénagoras (n. 11 above) 66.

<sup>56</sup> L. Petit, "Actes de Xénophon," V. V. 10 supp. 1 (1903) 80; Cantacuzenus (n. 6 above) 2.491.

lived in the cities. The Choumnoi had large estates near Thessalonica, the Tornikioi in Macedonia, the Melissenoi, in the fifteenth century, held the city of Messene and large estates on the Messenian Gulf.<sup>57</sup> Cantacuzenus was extremely rich. Originally the estates of his family were in Asia Minor, but by the mid-fourteenth century the bulk of his lands were situated in and near Serres, near the Maritsa River, in Thessaly, and in Constantinople proper. In 1341, he found it impossible to estimate the amount of money he had lost in Constantinople, because it was so immense. In the countryside, he claimed to have lost 5,000 head of cattle, 1,000 pairs of oxen, 200 camels, 2,500 mares, 300 mules, 500 donkeys, 50,000 pigs, 70,000 sheep, and much corn.<sup>58</sup>

Some of the properties of the aristocracy had been granted in the form of *pronoia*, that is, land held conditionally, for the lifetime of the grantee only, and in return for military service. It is well known, of course, that Michael VIII began to change the nature of the *pronoia* fundamentally, by making it hereditary in order to attract and keep supporters.<sup>59</sup> His son, Andronicus II, continued to grant the requests of large and medium *pronoia*-holders, and transformed part at least of their holdings into hereditary possessions. There were, it seems, several degrees of ownership, from the purely conditional, non-hereditary *pronoia*, to *pronoiai* that were granted in hereditary tenure, but which

<sup>57</sup> Boissonade (n. 40 above) letter 24; Verpeaux (n. 9 above) 255; Pachymeres (n. 8 above) 2.193; L. Petit, "Actes de Pantocrator," V.V. 10 Supp. 2 (1910). 4-7; Pseudo-Phrantzes, ed. V. Grecu (Bucharest 1966) 270. It is, of course, impossible to estimate the exact extent and value of these properties. The revenues of particular pieces of land, whose acreage is known, can be very roughly estimated from Ostrogorsky's formula. He suggests that in the fourteenth century, the "lord's demesne," that is, the land what was *not* given out to the *paroikoi*, was five to ten times larger than the *παροικική γῆ* and that the average revenue of the seigneurial reserve was one *hyperpyron* per 50 *modioi* of arable land: Ostrogorsky, "Vizantijskie Piscovye knigi," BS 9 (1948) 239-241; Ostrogorsky (n. 45 above) 296-301; Gorjanov (n. 3 above) 127-130. These figures are drawn from ecclesiastical *praktika*. The lay *pronoia* of Michael Monomachos yielded only one *hyperpyron* per 80 *modioi*, and the *παροικική γῆ* was equal to that reserved to the *pronoia* holder: Ostrogorsky (n. 46 above) 347ff. How typical the case of Monomachos was remains to be seen. In the archives of Xeropotamou there are two documents that provide a basis for comparison. In one we can see that the *pronoia* of Demetrios Iatropoulos (before 1275) contained—among other lands—1,600 *modioi* in Volvos. Of these, 800 were given to *paroikoi*. The remaining 800 *modioi* yielded 16 *hyperpyra*, that is, one *hyperpyron* per 50 *modioi*: J. Bompaire, *Actes de Xéropotamou* (Paris 1964) n. 10. In the first years of the fourteenth century we find this land mentioned again. There is no mention now of a distinction between the land of the lord and that of the *paroikoi*. 1,500 *modioi* are said to yield 30 *hyperpyra*, that is, one *hyperpyron* per 50 *modioi*: Bompaire n. 18B.

<sup>58</sup> Cantacuzenus (n. 6 above) 2.184-185, 192; Gregoras (n. 22 above) 2.767; Lemerle (n. 50 above) no. 18; Dölger (n. 33 above) no. 2746; cf. Weiss (n. 5 above) 8, 21-22; he shows that in the modern province of Serres (21 km<sup>2</sup> of pasture) there are 75,038 sheep and 33,873 goats.

<sup>59</sup> Pachymeres (n. 8 above) 1.92.

paid the major taxes of *sitarkia*, *kastroktisia*, *aviotikion*, and the head tax,<sup>60</sup> to lands that were granted in hereditary fashion, incurred no taxes whatsoever, and even shed the owner's obligation to serve the emperor.<sup>61</sup> The evolution of the *pronoia* as a hereditary holding was greatly helped by the civil wars, much as the evolution of the hereditary fief was assisted by civil wars and anarchy in post-Carolingian France.<sup>62</sup>

The landowners, even those of moderate means—the lower part of our first group—enjoyed along with their wealth great political power or, at the very least, a certain degree of independence from the central government.<sup>63</sup> The great aristocratic families, for one thing, had a virtual monopoly of high military office. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the men who occupied the offices of *grand domestic* (the highest military office), *protostrator* and *pinkernes*, nearly always had names like Palaeologus, Raoul, Tarchaneiotes Cantacuzenus, Syrgiannes, Philanthropenos, Melissenos, Synadenos.<sup>64</sup> The list of *grand stratopedarches* admits some new names, such as Choumnos, Metochites and Sphrantzes.<sup>65</sup> Even less elevated offices, such as that of the domestics of the *themes*, were populated by friends and relatives of the emperor.<sup>66</sup> As for the government of the provinces, it was in the hands of two sets of people: the great families with their court connections and the provincial aristocracy; the two groups tended to merge in the Morea in the fifteenth century. Thessaly was one of the areas where decentralization had been most advanced, and where the provincial aristocracy was most powerful. The *archontes* of Thessaly, the Maliasinoi, the Gavrielopouloi, the Strategopoulo,

<sup>60</sup> For example, Miklosich and Müller (n. 55 above) 5.89-90: grant of 1,600 *modii* to George Troulenos, *oikeios* of Andronicus II.

<sup>61</sup> For example, Miklosich and Müller (*Ibid.*, 5.107), grant to Diplovatatzes, 1338; *ibid.*, 109-110, grant of Andronicus III to John Panaretos; L. Petit and B. Korabiev, "Actes de Chilandar," V. V. 17 suppl. 1 (1911) 50-51: grant, in March, 1301, of 6,000 *modii* near Serres and Thessalonica, given to the *oikeios* of Andronicus II, Michael Angelos. He may sell the land, transmit it to his heirs, he seems to be paying no taxes, and he owes no service "*ἐκτός δουλείας*").

<sup>62</sup> The process of heritability of the *pronoia* went so far so fast, that in 1344, a widow, now a nun, received part of the *oikonomia* of her husband; Andronicus II had forbidden a similar affair in 1325: W. Regel, *Χρυσόβουλλα και γράμματα τῆς ἐν τῷ Ἀγίῳ Ὁρει Ἀθω ἱερᾶς καὶ σεβασμίας Μεγίστης Μονῆς τοῦ Βατοπεδίου* (St. Petersburg 1898) no. 5; Miklosich and Müller (n. 55 above) 5.117; A. Guillou, *Les archives de St.-Jean-Prodrôme* (Paris 1955) no. 16.

<sup>63</sup> The independence of the smaller *archontes* can be seen, for example, in the letter of Michael Gavrielopoulos to the *archontes* of Phanari, Miklosich and Müller (no. 55 above) 5. 260-261.

<sup>64</sup> R. Guiland, "Le grand domestique," *Recherches* 1.404-425; "Le protostrator," *ibid.* 478-497; "Le maître d'hôtel de l'empereur," *ibid.* 237-265, esp. 246-247.

<sup>65</sup> Guiland (n. 28 above) 498-521.

<sup>66</sup> Guiland, "Les domestiques des thèmes d'Orient et des thèmes d'Occident," *Recherches* 1.558-593.

the Raoul, were notorious for their dislike of the central government.<sup>67</sup> The French version of the Chronicle of the Morea mentions that in 1303, "tout li baron et li haut home de la Blaquie," faced with the government of a minor, met together and decided to offer the regency to Guy II de la Roche, duke of Athens, because he was a powerful man who could defend the area against the emperor and the despot of Epirus.<sup>68</sup> With the death of John II, in 1318, Thessaly devolved on the Byzantine emperor, but rather in the form of a vacant fief returning to its suzerain. Even then, it was only part of Thessaly which returned to the Byzantine Empire, whereas the southern parts remained relatively independent.<sup>69</sup> Within Thessaly, the fragmentation of authority can be seen in the letter of Michael Gavrielopoulos to the *archontes* of Phanari, in which he gave them guarantees concerning the guarding of the fort, and limiting their obligations to military service, the defence of the fort, the *kommerkion*, and a couple of other taxes.<sup>70</sup>

Quite early in the Palaeologan period the state itself helped the process of decentralization. The practice was established of giving away parts of the empire to members of the imperial family to govern in a fashion that soon became independent. Michael VIII apparently wanted to give his favorite son, Constantine, Thessalonica to rule as an independent kingdom.<sup>71</sup> Later, after the battle of the Maritsa, Manuel, who was already despot of Thessalonica, added Serres and eastern Macedonia to the areas he governed directly. His independence even extended to the realm of foreign policy, and it is well known that he carried through union negotiations with Pope Urban VI, resulting, perhaps, in a union of the Latin church and the church of Thessalonica.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Miklosich and Müller (n. 55 above) 4.345, 390, 420. On Thessaly, see I. I. Sokolov, "Krypnie i melkie vlasteli v Fessalij v epoky Paleologov," V.V. 24 (1923-26) 35-44; A. Soloviev, "Fessalijskie archonty v XIV v.," BS 4 (1932) 159ff.; B. Ferjančić, "Posedi porodice Maliasina u Tesaliji," Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta 9 (1966) 33-48.

<sup>68</sup> J. A. Buchon ed., *Recherches historiques* 1 (Paris 1845) 406.

<sup>69</sup> Gregoras (n. 22 above) 1.279; cf. G. T. Dennis, *The Reign of Manuel II Palaeologus in Thessalonica 1382-1387*, *Orientalia christiana analecta* 159 (Rome 1960) 104.

<sup>70</sup> Miklosich and Müller (n. 55 above) 5.260-261 (1295).

<sup>71</sup> Gregoras (n. 22 above) 1.187: "ἐβούλετο γάρ . . . τὸ περὶ Θεσσαλονίκην τε καὶ Μακεδονίαν μέρος τῆς ὅλης ἡγεμονίας Ῥωμαίων ἀποτέμω, ἰδίαν ἀρχὴν τινα περιποιήσασθαι τούτῳ καὶ βασιλείον αὐτοκρατορίαν." There are traces of a concept of heritability with regard to these holdings: in 1326, the panhypersebastos John, son of Constantine, nephew of Andronicus II, son-in-law of Stephen III Dečanski, and governor of Thessalonica, rebelled and planned to govern Macedonia independently. He based his claims on Michael VIII's preference of Constantine over Andronicus II, and, presumably, on Michael's plan to give Thessalonica and Macedonia to John's father: Gregoras 1.374; Cantacuzenus (n. 6 above) 1.208-215; U. V. Bosch, *Andronikos III Palaiologos. Versuch einer Darstellung der byzantinischen Geschichte in den Jahren 1321-1341* (Amsterdam 1965) 39-40.

<sup>72</sup> Barker (n. 24 above) 51-56; cf. Dennis (n. 69 above) 99-109. He suggests that Manuel acted more as a rival emperor than as an associate emperor, so independent was his foreign policy.



Manuel himself gave three of his sons, Theodore, Andronicus, and Constantine, what in the West would be called appanages,<sup>73</sup> whereas Andronicus IV, Manuel's brother, had been given the cities of Selymbria, Heracleia, Rodosto, and Panidos to govern.

Other men, who were not members of the immediate imperial family, were also granted large areas to govern. In 1357, two brothers, John and Alexius, received as hereditary lands (*κατὰ λόγον γονικότητος*) Chrysopolis, Anaktoropolis, and Thasos. In 1367 they also appear as governors of Christopolis where they held *πρόσκαιρον ἀρχήν*.<sup>74</sup> The following evolution seems to have taken place: individuals were granted *pronoiai*; they requested that these lands—or some of them, presumably the best ones—become hereditary; they received exemptions from most if not all state taxes, and collected themselves the taxes of their *paroikoi*; and some of these men were appointed as governors of particular territories. It seems that in the Palaeologan period, the emperor did not want to do, or did not have the power to do what Charlemagne had done centuries earlier: that is, to avoid appointing public officials in territories where these officials had landed wealth and interests. Thus, we reach the point, in the fifteenth century, where the Byzantine emperors gave up to private individuals not merely lands, not merely the right to collect seigneurial taxes from *paroikoi*, but entire areas, to be governed and transmitted in hereditary fashion, areas that paid both their seigneurial and their administrative, public, taxes to these *authentai*. The decomposition of the Byzantine state is obvious when documents such as the Gemistos file appear. The sons of Gemistos were both governors and landlords of the lands granted to them; and this is the ultimate evolution of the *pronoia*, and the merging of the political and economic functions of the aristocracy.<sup>75</sup>

These developments signal a change of attitude on the part of the central government. When, in the early fourteenth century, Irene of Montferrat, the wife of Andronicus II, had suggested to her husband that he divide the empire into appanages for her sons, he answered in a very dignified manner that he did not have the right to change old imperial laws, and to change the government of the state from a monarchy to a "polyarchy."<sup>76</sup> Yet he himself granted so many privileges to individuals and groups that he seems to have accepted a change in the Byzantine concept of sovereignty. In his chrysobull granted to Janina on the occasion of the return of that city to the empire

<sup>73</sup> Ducae, *Historia turco-byzantina (1341-1462)*, ed. V. Grecu (Bucharest 1958) 175.

<sup>74</sup> Lemerle (n. 30 above) 206ff.; Petit (n. 57 above) no. 5; Dölger (n. 33 above) no. 3061; Dölger (n. 30 above) no. 41.

<sup>75</sup> Sp. Lambros, *Παλαιολογία και Πελοποννησιακά* (Athens 1926, 1930) 3.331-333; 4. 19-22, 104-105, 106-109, 192-195; cf. Zakythinos (n. 20 above) 2.198-201.

<sup>76</sup> Gregoras (n. 22 above) 1.233-235. According to Gregoras, Irene really wanted western-type appanages, that is, independent areas held as personal and hereditary possessions. Cf. Pseudo-Phrantzes (n. 57 above) 172.

in 1318, he found himself forced to promise the inhabitants that he would not give the city over to Franks or to anyone else, but he would rule it himself, "for my Majesty has totally appropriated this city."<sup>77</sup> These are more the words of a feudal lord than those of a Byzantine sovereign. In the Latin texts of Byzantine treaties with Venice the words "his vassals" are used by the emperor in reference to his subjects.<sup>78</sup> And the evolution of ideas continued. Whereas Andronicus II would not grant appanages, John V could say "it is customary to emperors to give any part of their country to anyone they please."<sup>79</sup> In other words, the empire is divisible at the will of the emperor. The Byzantine state and the authority of the state had become a personal, proprietary possession in the eyes of its sovereigns, the same men who had transformed state lands, given in *pronoia*, into hereditary possessions.

This conceptual background is necessary in order to understand the general role of the Byzantine aristocracy. One has to start from two basic points: that the Byzantine aristocracy, in the person of the Palaeologan emperors, had captured the state, and that from 1261 on the power of the state degenerated constantly, and instead was assumed by other groups. Occasionally it was taken over by the towns, many of which received privileges, carried over into the Turkish period,<sup>80</sup> and some of which pursued an independent foreign policy.<sup>81</sup> The church was another such group, powerful, rich, influential, and by the end of the fourteenth century it had taken over many of the judicial functions of the state.<sup>82</sup> The powerful, the *dynatoi*, were one other group,

<sup>77</sup> Miklosich and Müller (n. 55 above) 5.76-84, esp. 80: "ἐπειδὴ καὶ τελείως ιδιοποιήσατο τὴν τοιαύτην πόλιν ἢ βασιλεία μου."

<sup>78</sup> G. M. Thomas-R. Predelli, *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum* (Venice 1880) 1.145. Andronicus wrote that the despots of Epirus were united to him "iuramento vassallagii": *ibid.* 146.

<sup>79</sup> "καὶ τοῦτο τοῖς βασιλεύουσιν ἐν ἔθει ὁ βούλονται τῆς αὐτῶν χώρας οἷς βούλονται τοῦτ' ἀριστεῖον διδόναι": Zakythinos (n. 20 above) 2.73.

<sup>80</sup> One example is the charter granted to the *archon* Strategopoulos and the other *archontes*, great and small, of Janina, by Sinan Paşa, in 1430: S. Lambros, "Ἡ ἐλληνικὴ ὥς ἐπίσημος γλῶσσα τῶν Σουλτάνων," *Νέος Ἑλληνομνημονεύς* 5 (1908) 63. This charter repeats some of the privileges granted to the city of Janina by Andronicus II in 1318: Miklosich and Müller (n. 55 above) 5.77-84. Cf. K. Amantos, "Οἱ προνομιακοὶ ὀρίσμοι τῶν Μουσουλμάνων ὑπὲρ τῶν Χριστιανῶν," *Ἑλληνομνήματα* 9 (1936) 120 ff. Cf. D. A. Zakythinos, "La commune grèque," *L'Hellénisme contemporain* (1948) 295-310, 414-428, and E. Francès, "La féodalité et les villes byzantines au XIII<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles," *BS* 16 (1955) 91.

<sup>81</sup> See the example of Monemvasia in 1394, in Zakythinos (n. 20 above) 1 (Paris 1932) 127-129.

<sup>82</sup> L. Petit, "La réforme judiciaire d'Andronic Paléologue (1329)," *Échos d'Orient* 9 (1906) 134ff.; P. Lemerle, "Le juge général des Grecs et la réforme judiciaire d'Andronic III," *Mémorial L. Petit* (1948) 292-316; "Recherches sur les institutions judiciaires à l'époque des Paléologues. 1: Le tribunal impérial," *Mélanges H. Grégoire* 1 (1949) 368-384; "Recherches sur les institutions judiciaires à l'époque des Paléologues. 2: Le tribunal du patriarcat ou tribunal synodal," *Mélanges Peeters* (1950) 320-323; I. Ševčenko, "Léon Bardalès et les juges généraux, ou la corruption des incorruptibles," *Byz.* 19 (1949) 247-259.

perhaps the most important, which appropriated those public functions the state could no longer fulfill. They and their *paroikoi* made up much of the army.<sup>83</sup> It is true that mercenaries were still hired, and it is also true that there is evidence that individuals or corporate entities which did not own *pronoiai* were still bound to give military service.<sup>84</sup> But on balance it seems that the army was led by the *pronoia*-holders. And the army frequently acted against the interests of the state. The despot Theodore of the Morea, and the Emperor Manuel II both had to fight against the unruly local *archontes*, both great and small, who considered any danger to their independence worse than the danger of the Turks, and who fought bitterly against the construction of the Hexamilion, the great wall near Corinth.<sup>85</sup>

The powerful, too, took over much of the administration of the realm. In the late thirteenth century, they had merely appropriated most of the military and many of the civil offices, and they were appointed as governors of cities or entire areas; by the end of the Palaeologan period they had confused their public with their private rights and functions, much as the feudal lords had done in France in the eleventh century.<sup>86</sup> The despot of the Morea, Theodore, might fight against the unruly aristocracy of the despotate. But the despots of the Morea were themselves involved in the decentralization of the state, for they were virtually independent of Constantinople: they were the chiefs of the army, the ultimate source of justice, they gave privileges and immunities, and pursued their own foreign policy. Thus, Byzantine society in the Palaeologan period developed along a road of decentralization of political authority and social stratification, a road that was almost predetermined by the triumph of the Palaeologi in 1258. The impoverishment of the central government and the incursions of foreigners so weakened the authority of the centralized state that it no longer had the power (even had it had the will) to oppose the great magnates. They, with their solid economic

<sup>83</sup> Werner (n. 1 above) 36.

<sup>84</sup> Gorjanov (n. 3 above) 116-117, draws this conclusion from the specific repeal of these obligations in the chrysobull to Janina and the letter to the *archontes* of Phanari. Other documents support this conclusion. See for example Miklosich and Müller (n. 55 above) 4. 251-253 (1237), and Dölger (n. 33 above) nos. 1748, 1759. There is also the fact that Andronicus II was hoping, in 1321, to use part of the sum of 1,000,000 *hyperpyra*, which he had collected from heavy taxes, to establish a standing army—one assumes that these soldiers would not be *pronoia*-holders. See Gregoras (n. 22 above) 1.317-18.

<sup>85</sup> Zakythinos (n. 20 above) 2.217-226; Barker (n. 24 above) 272-280, 301-317; Dennis (n. 69 above) 115; R. - J. Loenertz, "Pour l'histoire du Péloponnèse au xiv<sup>e</sup> siècle (1382-1404)," *REB* 1 (1943) 159-161, published the political poem that discussed the efforts of the *archontes* to dispose of the despot Theodore, "*καὶ ἀδεσπότης μένειν*." Mazaris refers to the towns of "*μικρῶν, κιβδήλων, δολίων καὶ παμμιάρων καὶ οὐδανῶν τοπαρχῶν*": J.-Fr. Boissonade *Anecdota graeca* 3 (Paris 1831) 118.

<sup>86</sup> Georges Duby, *La société aux XI<sup>e</sup> et XII<sup>e</sup> siècles dans la région macedonnaise* (Paris 1953) passim esp. 643.

bases in the countryside as well as in the cities, assumed many of the powers and privileges of the state. But decentralization went further than that. Below the great magnates, smaller pockets of authority developed; aristocrats of moderate wealth, as well as the rich inhabitants of towns, could get self-government and independence.

If one looks at this situation from the viewpoint of Constantinople, he can easily accuse the aristocracy of being a major factor in precipitating the decline of the Byzantine state. But perhaps the viewpoint of a central authority is not always the correct one, even though modern western historians have been nourished with statist beliefs. In the Palaeologan state we have the rise of particularism; what this means is the creation of *de facto* authorities, at a level where they were functional. As the oecumenical state was breaking down, regional authorities replaced it, and may have made for more efficient government. Whereas at this point I can offer nothing more solid than speculation, I think that it might be constructive to compare the situation in Byzantium in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to that of western Europe in the period of feudalization. When one looks at the western European developments, one is struck by the fact that modern European society and polity began to be created after the breakdown of international states like that of Charlemagne. Modern Europe was built block by block, and the blocks were the regional economic, administrative, and judicial units that were formed around a monastery, a lord's castle, a small town. In Byzantium, such blocks appear for the first time in the Palaeologan period. The aristocracy had formed nuclei of economic organization, both in the countryside and in the cities. As international commerce passed into the hands of the Italians, small-scale commerce between town and country passed into the hands of these wealthy individuals. They also formed nuclei of political power, sharing their influence with the church and with autonomous town communities. Furthermore, the aristocracy, secure in its new role, presided over a cultural development of great importance. The Palaeologan aristocracy began to accept and adopt a language similar to that spoken by the people. The romances and songs and paraphrases of the Palaeologan period were written in a language which would have seemed very vulgar to the learned Byzantines of earlier times. The aristocracy, who were both patrons of and contributors to the new literature, were forging both a new language and new links with the people.<sup>87</sup> One

<sup>87</sup> Beck, "Griechische Volksliteratur" (n. 22 above) 80-81, considers the development of a vernacular literature a progressive phenomenon. Cf. Beck, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Volksliteratur* (Munich 1971) 115-153. On the contrary, Ševčenko, "Society and Intellectual Life," *XIV<sup>e</sup> Congrès* (n. 1 above) 1.29 sees a decline in Byzantine intellectual life, and connects it with the decline in court patronage.

An example of the new functional aspect of the aristocracy can be found in the will of the *megas primmikerios* John (1384). He called his *paroikoi* his "*παῖδιά*," said that they had been faithful to him, and left them free to come and go as they wished. The monastery

wonders whether here, as in western medieval Europe, the fact that the governed and the governors were in daily contact, the fact that the remote state was replaced by a much more tangible authority, might not have led to viable social and political forms. After all, in western Europe it was just such nuclei of political, economic, and cultural organization which led to the creation of viable institutions once the insecurity and the invasions had stopped. In Byzantium, of course, any possibility of such a long-term development was deflected by the Ottomans, who fed on the weakness of the Byzantine state. The great landlords, at least some of them, accepted the conqueror, who frequently promised to respect their rights and allow them to keep their lands, and even "to make you better than you were before."<sup>88</sup>

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to which he bequeathed his lands was to help them, at their request: Petit, (n. 55 above) no. 6. A different view appears in Mrs. Fotina's interpretation of the *Song of Belisarios* which, speaking of the power struggle between the state (Andronicus III, Apokaukos) and the landed aristocracy, makes the *mesoi*, and the people in general into allies of the state. The author, a man of the people, according to Mrs. Fotina, talks of Andronicus III and Apokaukos as the last hope of the Byzantines against the Turks, and this view may have influenced his—and the people's—attitude toward them. In any case, it is quite clear that the relation of the aristocracy to the city population must have been of a different level of exploitation from their relation to the rural population.

<sup>88</sup> Miklosich and Müller (n. 55 above) 3 (1865), 290. I think, however, that E. Francès has exaggerated the collaboration of the Byzantine aristocracy with the Ottomans: "La féodalité byzantine et la conquête turque," *Studia et acta Orientalia*, 4 (1962) 69-90.